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SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MTS, INR/EAP, PRM/ANE

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SUBJECT: ROHINGYA MOVED FROM ACEH TO MEDAN, AWAIT NEXT STEPS

REF A) JAKARTA 39 B) JAKARTA 205

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Indonesian authorities transferred 190 Rohingya to Medan from Aceh on December 17, where many had spent nearly a year in one of two camps located in East Aceh and on Wei Island. The arrival of the Rohingya was rejected by communities at two original sites intended for their relocation, necessitating the use of a previously-identified backup site. All of the Rohingya are healthy and unharmed, and IOM has provided for all of their immediate needs. UNHCR plans to inform the Rohingya of their status determinations in the near future. Both IOM and UNHCR believe the notification process has the potential to create tensions. End Summary.  
Background

¶2. (SBU) A total of 391 Rohingya (Ref A and B) arrived in two groups between January and February, 2009; the first on Wei Island on January 8 and the second in East Aceh on February 3. The 193 Rohingya on Wei Island have been housed on an Indonesian naval base since their arrival, assisted by local government and Indonesian Red Cross assistance. 177 Rohingya remained at the Wei Island naval base for transfer to Medan on December 17. The vast majority of the 198 Rohingya who originally arrived in East Aceh on February 3 have absconded from a local government camp run in coordination with IOM and PMI over the past 5 months, only 13 remaining at the time of their transfer to Medan December 17.

Transfer Process to Medan

¶3. (SBU) IOM Officials discussed the preparations for transfer of the 190 remaining Rohingya to Medan on December 17 and their chaotic arrival in the early hours of December 18 at a housing complex in Medan where arrangements had been made for them to stay. Initial notice for the move came to IOM from Indonesian immigration officials in early December via a letter to Immigration from the Department of Foreign Affairs (DEPLU). DEPLU had been reluctant for some time to follow IOM's group housing solution because of concerns over community reaction in Medan, where existing immigration detention centers are already overfilled with South Asian migrants.

¶4. (SBU) Large buses were rented for the transfer by IOM and the group home sites identified, but according to IOM little in the way of official instructions were passed to Medan-based immigration or police officials over the past two weeks in order to prepare for the Rohingya's arrival. As a result, IOM staff said a large group of locals (egged on by journalists) confronted them as they attempted to depart the group homes following the transfer of the Rohingyas during the early hours of December 18. The locals demanded tighter security at the site and threatened violence.

15. (SBU) After long discussions between locals, police, immigration authorities, and IOM the decision was made to transfer the Rohingya to a back-up location (a vacated education and training center) at around 3AM on December 18. The transfer was completed over several hours and 182 of 190 Rohingya are, as of December 22, located in a single compound with a 70-room main building. The remaining 8 are nearby in a separate location as space preparations are made to bring them all together on the training center compound shortly.

#### Current Arrangements Appropriate

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16. (U) IOM has provided for 4-person bunk bed arrangements with table and fan in 48 of the rooms at the vacated training center, each room including its own bathroom. Bedding, food, plentiful access to water for washing and drinking, and back-up generator power are all up and running. Many of the Rohingya observed by Consulate Medan Staff were active playing badminton or talking, and a TV room and common area have already been provided by IOM as well. A large common eating area is also ready, and preparations are being made to issue vouchers to the Rohingya so that they can shop at the local Carrefour Supermarket for their food needs and cook for themselves. IOM has provided catered meals to all the Rohingya since their December 17 arrival.

17. (SBU) Indonesian immigration and police authorities appear to have received word that their role is to monitor the site rather than control the comings and goings of the residents, and while a few police were evident they made no attempt to control the movements of the Rohingya. Immigration officials that happened to arrive at the same time of the Consulate's visit to the site

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expressed satisfaction at the arrangement and are ready for next steps as determined by DEPLU regarding UNHCR's access to the Rohingya to give status notifications. IOM staff told Consulate Medan that UNHCR had been in touch with them about giving status determinations to the Rohingya as early as December 21 but were holding off as per IOM's request.  
IOM Concerns on Bangladeshi Rohingya

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18. (SBU) IOM's translator who has worked closest with the Rohingya stated to Consulate Medan staff that the 57 Bangladeshi nationals among the 190 Rohingya in Medan had previously filled out documentation allowing for them to be repatriated to their country of citizenship. However, given the long amount of time that has passed most of this group now feels they have nothing left to go back to and has expressed their desire to stay in Indonesia or move on to Malaysia via any means available. The IOM translator said that they could react in an unpredictable manner and possibly become very upset should UNHCR inform them that their requests have been rejected and Indonesian immigration officials initiate a process for their return to Bangladesh.

19. (SBU) IOM senior staff have met with law enforcement officials in Medan on several occasions and have good working contacts with Indonesian immigration and police authorities. They are aware of the need to provide adequate oversight and security for the site, including for potential problems during any UNHCR status determination meetings at the site. Police and immigration officials are aware of their role and the limits of their authority. IOM indicated to Consulate Medan staff on December 22 that they would work closely with police to ensure any security issues arising from UNHCR status notifications were dealt with appropriately both in order to protect the Rohingya and ensure the safety of the local IOM and UNHCR staff working at the site.

110. (SBU) While the process has been slow and lines of authority often blurred, the Government of Indonesia has handled the Rohingya issue with great humanitarian concern and ultimately agreed to move the populations to Medan as it became clear that other viable options did not exist.

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